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INTRODUCTION

In the spring and summer of 1957 the Danish Dokan Expedition was working under Professors Harald Ingholt and Jørgen Læssøe on the Rania plain west of Lesser Zab, a tributary of the Tigris in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Expedition concentrated on the excavation of the mound Tell Shemshāra[1]. Before the expedition left Denmark it offered to take with it a cultural anthropologist from the Ethnographical Department of the National Museum, who, based on the excavation camp on the right bank of the Lesser Zab, would have an opportunity to investigate Kurdish villages in the vicinity. The assistance of the Carlsberg Foundation enabled my association with the Danish Dokan Expedition. 114 121

Being a woman anthropologist, I was given, in addition to general investigations of Kurdish ethnography, the special task of studying woman's cultural pattern, which in Muslim areas is difficult for male investigators to undertake.

The necessary female interpreter for such investigations was obtained through the former Kurdish Minister, Tawfik Wahbi, who at that time was living in Baghdad and was in touch with the Danish Chargé d'Affaires, F. Lyste, succeeded later in the summer of 1957 by F. de Jonquières. I left Denmark in May to join the expedition at the Dokan Dam Site, which is near the dam building over Lesser Zab, the Anglo-French[2] engineering project in the Kurdish mountains started by the Iraq Development Board.

As it transpired that the neighbouring twin villages Topzawa-Rakawa, from which the British and French engineers obtained some of their workmen, offered excellent possibilities for study, it was arranged through the Resident Engineer of the Dokan Dam Site, Mr. J. G. Campbell, that, whilst waiting for a woman interpreter, I should be taken as a paying guest in Sheikh Taifur's home in Topsawa as a member of this village-owner's family.

In the course of three weeks, through the good offices of Tawfik Wahbi and the mayor of Sulaimani[3], the capital of the Liwa of Sulaimani, touch was gained with a young Kurdish woman school teacher, Maliha Karim Sa'id, who, accompanied by her 13 year old half-brother, agreed to go with me to the villages mentioned and stay with me in the sheikh's home as long as my work out there went on. When this had ended, supplemented by a visit to and stay at the now evacuated and flooded ferry village, Mirza Rustam, with trips over the mountains to Shadala and Sargalu, the field of work was transferred to my interpreter's home in Sulaimani, a Kurdish provincial home. From here journeys [115]

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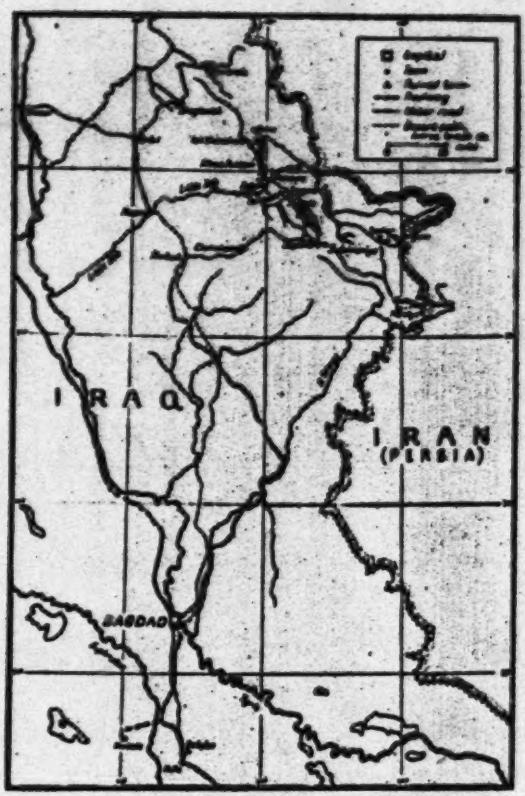

Lokal map of the area visited. The area is covered by R. A. F.'s aeronautical maps Nos. 340, 427 and 428.

Thus during my appros. four months stay in Iraqi Kurdistan I did not, as planned, stay among Europeans at the Danish Dokan Expedition's camp with daily, but isolated visits to Kurdish villages, but lived almost uninterruptedly in Kurdish homes. This greatly facilitated the work of the woman interpreter, who would hardly have secured her family's permission to live permanently in an European excavation camp among foreign men even though another woman was present. In addition to the opportunity to follow the life of the village, I also had the chance to study life in an urban environment. In addition, my interpreter, besides being of invaluable assistance in my work of investigating the lives

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of the other women, was also an intelligent representative of the then commencing transformation of the Kurdish woman's life pattern, doubly manifest, as in her home at Sulemani there was, in addition to sisters who represented the same development, a group of elderly woma that constituted the background on which this change is taking place.

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CHAPTER IV

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

Bringing children into the world is the justification and idea of the Oriental marriage[1]—also the Kurdish.

The following particulars concerning birth were given me by the sheikh's wife at Topzawa.

Parturition takes place in a sitting posture. One of the ordinary copper-cooking pots, a milk pail, is placed on the floor bottom-up[2]. Over this is laid a thin, padded mattress on which the woman in labour seats herself. An assistant places herself behind, holds her under the arms, and supports her back. Another squats down in front so that the woman about to give birth can grasp her round the neck. This woman in front acts as the midwife. She may be an ordinary, experienced woman from the village. However, in Serkan there was a midwife who had undergone a three months course in Baghdad, and the woman who had assisted the two wives in my interpreter's home at the 27 births that had taken place there, was stated to be a fully-trained midwife, thus the first to be trained in Sulaimani[3]. At the time I was there this woman was about 50 years of age.

Births take place in one of the rooms of the home. I was told that the father can be present. The umbilical cord is cut by knife or scissors. The Arab doctor at the Dokan Dam Site told me that in case of a sudden birth out in the mountains, the umbilical cord could be severed by a sharp stone, another stone being used as base.

In the villages I visited there was no doctor. Even a complicated birth was left to the local authorities in the form of an experienced neighbour or a midwife with a three month certificate. A female German gynecologist at the hospital at Sulaimani told of a case where the birth came to a stop in one of the villages. The fetus was dead, and the woman had lain for 24 hours with all her natural functions at a standstill, while the village women debated whether or not the dangerously ill woman should be transported by mule over the mountains to Sulaimani to seek medical attention. Finally it was decided to send her to the town where her life was saved thanks to the efforts of the gynecologist.

In another case a woman in Serkan contracted milk fever after giving birth. She was taken on horseback and then by bus to the hospital at Sulaimani. The child, which was a few days old, could not be taken and died during the woman's absence.

The new-born child, *mindl*, is wrapped in a piece of cotton material that acts as a nappy and is changed three times a day. It is then laid on a large piece of material folded into a triangle that reaches to its shoulders and is somewhat larger than the legs. The cloth is about 1.00 m. x 1.00 m. The child's legs are straightened out and the lower points of the cloth are bent up around the feet. The two upper

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middle of the last century. Within her seclusion the Kurdish woman, like other Islamic women, is assured by the law and by the Coran of rights quite other than those accorded Western women prior to their emancipation[20]. Kurdish women were not suppressed. Even the humble village women were no more suppressed than any woman in a peasant community could be when the biggest share of the work falls to her lot. It was a physically, not a legally, inferior status.

Nor are there any grounds for talking about lack of equal rights because men and women in Kurdistan each have their own pattern of life. One might as well say that a man had not the same rights as a woman because he was unable to follow her pattern of life. The world of men and women were simply divided, more or less (mostly more) from the cradle to the grave. One can therefore talk of an existing justification for this division, with a deviation in favour of the man within the humble village milieu, and in favour of the woman in the educated urban milieu.

ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE KURDISH WOMAN'S CULTURAL PATTERN IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMING "EMANCIPATION"

It is a fact that the Kurdish Muslim area, like other Muslim territories, is on the threshold of a transformation. The introduction of the necessary industrialisation to improve the material side of this technically-underdeveloped country was, in 1957, practically on the doorstep. Even though these changes in the structure of society will last reach the Kurds, that political minority in mountains difficult of access, the years ahead will also bring this area into the melting pot.

In conclusion, therefore, a glance must be cast on the culture pattern of the Kurdish woman, a culture sentenced, if not to death, at all events to radical change, and some of the conditions existing in 1957 are judged in their relation to coming reconstruction. As mentioned in the introduction, I had in the person of my interpreter, an example of the most "advanced" feminine type among the Kurdish women studied. When placing the word "advanced" in inverted commas I do so advisedly.

As a rule one overlooks the fact that cultures older than our own, despite the lack of our Western technical facilities, may in other directions represent a more advanced culture stage, and that a change caused by bitter economic necessity so far from representing progress may, on the contrary, well have to be paid for by retrogression in other spheres. At first sight the introduction of the Western woman's form of life is regarded as being of direct benefit to women with foreign culture patterns. It thus seems surprising that the abolition of the veil, the dropping of seclusion and so forth meets with opposition from women at some places. A few examples of this can be quoted.

In the Muslim areas of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the veil was abolished by Marshal Tito in 1952. Two years later, when visiting these provinces, I was told that it cost a woman three months' imprisonment to retain the black veil and chequered over-garment which, with variants, I